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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000659

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SUBJECT: MARCH 24 NIGERIA AVIAN FLU UPDATE

REF: ABUJA 658

1. (SBU) Summary. Ogun State and GON officials culled by March 20 more than 85,000 birds at a farm in Akute, Ogun State. Culling workers did not use personal protective equipment. Almost 3,700 birds were culled at a farm in Iju, Lagos State. A Lagos State agricultural official denied AI's presence in the state. A French Government veterinarian said AI will afflict Nigeria for the next 10 to 20 years. End summary.

2. (U) The managing director of Shobowale Animashaun Farms in Akute, Ogun State, told the agricultural attache on March 15 that the Ogun and Government of Nigeria (GON) ministries of agriculture had culled poultry at the farm, and disinfected it. The farm had 86,000 laying birds. The farm's birds experienced high mortality rates about three weeks previously. The farm's management brought in veterinarians for fear the outbreak could be Newcastle disease or cholera. When the disease did not abate, the management called in Ogun State agricultural officials. Samples from the farm tested positive for H5N1 at the National Veterinary Research Institute in Vom. Confirmatory testing was expected shortly from the UN Food and Agriculture reference laboratory in Italy.

3. (U) A GON Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) official reported March 17 at the AI Crisis Management Center coordination meeting that 85,207 birds were culled at Ogun State's Shobowale Animashaun Farms -- the biggest individual culling operation so far in Nigeria. Culling finished by March 20. A Ministry of Health (MOH) official said the farm originally had roughly 200,000 birds, about 120,000 of which died. The farm had approximately 150 employees, who did not use personal protective equipment while culling poultry at the farm. An MOA official said the Alhaji Wale Oshinbajo Farms in Iju, Ifako Ijaiye Local Government Area, Lagos State, originally had 13,000 birds, 3,689 of which were culled.

4. (SBU) The Lagos State agriculture commissioner told the agricultural attache March 15 that because Akute, the affected area in Ogun State, is close to Iju in Lagos State, he suspected the virus might have spread to Lagos State. The agriculture commissioner appealed to the MOA, as well as to the USG, for assistance in combating AI. Foreign Agricultural Service employees visited the Lagos State Agricultural Development Authority's zonal extension officer (west), who said no outbreaks other than that in Akute were reported nearby. The Lagos official said the suspected area comes under his jurisdiction and he would hear from his field officers if any outbreak occurred in the area. He said his officers were enforcing strictly restrictions on the movement of birds within and across states. (Agricultural attache comment: This Lagos State official was in complete denial of AI's presence in his jurisdiction. End comment.)

Officials criticize lack of effective action  
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5. (SBU) Economic Officer attended the March 20 coordination meeting of the GON AI Crisis Management Center. The meeting's chairman, an MOH official, bemoaned AI's advance in Nigeria, saying, "The states affected are not taking this as seriously as necessary." All of Nigeria and Nigeria's neighbors were "now at risk." Also, there was "definitely laxity" in controlling the movement of poultry products between states. Nigeria was failing to implement culling and decontamination measures and had "allowed the disease to take the initiative." A French Government veterinarian seconded to the Pan-African Program for the Control of Epizootics (PACE) agreed, declaring that AI would afflict Nigeria for the next 10 to 20 years. An MOA official said Nigeria would start paying "this week" to poultry farmers its second round of compensation. The chair said the GON still was deciding whether to adopt a policy of vaccinations for birds.

16. (U) The agricultural attache and agricultural specialist attended on March 16 an AI workshop organized by Adewura Farms Ltd. and Illinois-based Brookside Agra USA, in conjunction with the Lagos Chapter of the Poultry Association of Nigeria (PAN). Adewura Farms is a major poultry layer operator, and Brookside Agra is a manufacturer of agricultural feed additives. Keynote speakers included the president of Brookside Agra USA, which developed a new vaccine against H5N1 and was conducting field trials. The company expected the National Institutes of Health to approve this AI vaccine in the next few weeks. Adewura Farms is the sole representative of Brookside Agra USA products in Nigeria.

17. (U) The MOH told the Centers for Disease Control on March 16 that the GON provided a waiver for imports of Tamiflu. The MOH was working closely with Nigeria's National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control to expedite Tamiflu's official registration, which was not yet completed. The GON reported March 15 it began procuring and stockpiling between 500,000 to 1,000,000 doses of Tamiflu.

18. (U) The GON earlier suggested AI possibly had mutated in Nigeria since first being detected there. The agricultural attache discussed this theory on March 16 with Dr. Tony Joannis of the Vom National Veterinary Research Institute. Joannis said the Vom laboratory had received no samples or indications that AI was changing in Nigeria.

19. (U) One of Nigeria's largest poultry producers said March 16 in Lagos that sales of poultry had picked up following their initial precipitous decline after AI was diagnosed in Nigeria. Poultry sales now were down 50%, compared to the 85% drop that occurred in the first several weeks after AI's diagnosis.

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